



In Common

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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A Message From Dave Cooke

I am pleased to introduce this first issue of *In Common*. This newsletter will be an important communication link between my ministry and educators, parents, and their communities, and will function as a tool for revising and strengthening *The Common Curriculum, Grades 1-9*. This working document was released in February 1993 with the aim of getting reactions and achieving implementation over a three-year period beginning in September 1993. The term "working document" recognizes that *The Common Curriculum* is neither final nor complete. I want it to be the basis of an ongoing process of collaborative curriculum development involving my ministry, educators, parents, and the wider public.

By provoking discussion of ideas and concerns related to education, *The Common Curriculum* will ensure that our policies and practices continue to keep pace with change, that they reflect our expanding understanding of how students learn, and that they promote overall excellence in education for all students. I urge you to become an active participant in this dialogue which is essential if we are to make sure that our province's education system provides our students with the knowledge, values, and skills they will need in the future. This first issue of

In Common will help you see how you can participate. Subsequent issues will provide stimulating ideas and discussion about what is working well, what needs to be clarified, what needs to be changed, and what needs to be added.

Implementing *The Common Curriculum* is a challenge for all of us. It is essential that outcomes-based education in Grades 1-9 and integrated programming in Grades 7 and 8 be implemented by September 1996.

While I recognize the impact of the current financial constraints,

the process of curriculum change must proceed to better equip our children for life in the twenty-first century. Much can be achieved if we work together, and it is essential that all sectors of the community work co-operatively to provide the best possible education for all students. Please share your ideas and concerns with us over the next year as we implement and continue to improve *The Common Curriculum*.

Dave Cooke
Minister of Education and Training

Please participate

in the process of revising and strengthening *The Common Curriculum*

The Common Curriculum, Grades 1-9 was released in February 1993 as a "working document", a term intended to indicate that it should be considered neither final nor complete. The intention is to have schools apply their professional knowledge and experience to the document as they work towards implementation over the next three years.

The pace of change in our society, our technology, and the world scene in general is so rapid that school curriculum cannot

remain static. Therefore, it is important that we revise and develop *The Common Curriculum* on an ongoing basis. It is also important that this revision and development be the result of a continuing dialogue involving the ministry, educators, parents, and the wider public.

The ministry is anxious to receive suggestions and information related to *The Common Curriculum* and its implementation in local schools from September 1993 to

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In Common is a newsletter produced by the Ministry of Education and Training to communicate information about the implementation of *The Common Curriculum, Grades 1-9* and to encourage feedback from schools and their communities. Such feedback will be used to revise the document and make it more responsive to the needs of the communities in which it is used.

In Common will be produced approximately every two months.

Shifting to Outcomes-based Education: The Need for Standards of Performance

When a shift is made from an objectives-based system to an outcomes-based system, the shift must be reflected in the approach taken to the setting of standards, assessment, and reporting. The emphasis in assessment shifts from describing *what has been covered or accomplished* to describing *how well the performance meets the stated outcomes and preset standards*.

As a starting point, it might be helpful to look at the difference between objectives and outcomes by comparing examples of each. Here's an objective from the Intermediate geography guideline developed under OSIS (*Ontario Schools, Intermediate and Senior Divisions*): "Students shall be provided with opportunities to become aware of environmental concerns in the community." And here's an outcome from *The Common Curriculum, Grades 1-9*: "Students will identify some key social, political, economic, and environmental issues and explain their relevance to the challenge of achieving sustainable development."

It is obvious that the first statement indicates what the teacher will do, and that the second indicates what the students will do. Initially, teachers may be intimidated by the notion of accountability implicit in an outcomes-based approach. On further reflection, however, it becomes clear that in an outcomes-based system the student is ultimately the one responsible for achievement; the teacher's role is to provide the professional expertise and instruction that will enable the student to be successful. In addition, if the teacher, student, and parent all have a clear understanding of what is expected in advance, there are likely to be fewer unpleasant surprises.

The accompanying chart helps to explain the differences between outcomes, standards, assessment,

and reporting. An *outcome* states the general result we want. *Standards of performance* indicate what we are willing to accept as evidence that the outcome has been achieved. *Assessment* is the process of determining the extent to which the standard has been met. *Reporting* indicates the degree to which the standard has been met and, if it is to be useful, it must identify what must be done when the standard has not yet been met.

Since in the past we have described achievement or standards in terms of subjects, the ministry is in the process of developing standards of performance in language and mathematics that will assist teachers in implementing *The Common Curriculum*, in which subjects are integrated and combined. The purpose of developing these standards is to provide high and consistent provincial expectations that will serve as common public reference points against which to measure student achievement. As we move towards full implementation of an outcomes-based system, standards of performance will need to be identified for other subject areas and crosscurricular outcomes as well.

Since we expect our students to become competent not only in

basics that require rote and recall, but in problem solving, decision making, and other essential life skills needed in our fast-paced and constantly changing world, we need to find valid and relevant ways of setting standards for these complex outcomes and of assessing students' performances. Many teachers are already doing excellent work in assessing these complex performances in their own classrooms. It will take longer to find reliable and cost-efficient ways of measuring these critical outcomes on a larger scale – in assessment across schools, systems, and jurisdictions.

Teachers have always set standards for student achievement at the classroom level. Unfortunately, these standards have often been implicit or unclear to students, parents, and the public. In an outcomes-based system, there can be no unstated expectations; the goal is to have everyone reach for and attain the same high and consistent standards of achievement.

In a public system as diverse as Ontario's, in which both excellence and equity are valued and in which parents' and students' own expectations vary so widely, developing such standards is a difficult task. Not only do the standards have to be explicit, they

Common Curriculum: Standards, Assessment, and Reporting

Determining Outcomes	Setting Standards	Assessing Performance	Reporting Results
Outcomes state the general results expected.	Standards state the expected range of student achievement for the outcomes.	Performance is assessed against the standards.	Results are reported in relation to the standards.

must be formulated in such a way as to allow for some professional judgement. At the same time, they must include criteria – indicators or evidence to ensure that they are applied in a common and consistent way. Lastly, they must reflect internationally accepted standards.

In the past, schools have relied almost totally on the teacher's assessment of students' work. It is essential in today's climate of accountability that the education system develop ways of involving parents more actively in determining the standards of achievement they want for their children. It is also important that students be encouraged to evaluate their own performance and to take responsibility for their achievement; the skills required for constructive peer and self-evaluation will be critical in the twenty-first century.

To determine whether established standards are being met, a wide range of assessment methods will need to be used. Again, for many teachers there is nothing new here; they are used to evaluating student achievement using a wide variety of assessment methods (quizzes, journals, formal tests, group and individual labs and assignments, observation checklists, exams, and reports or essays). Many teachers, however, will need help in developing the mechanisms that will allow them to assess complex performances in relation to standards. These scoring mechanisms or *rubrics*, as they are often called, have been used in athletics and the performing arts, as well as at science fairs, for many years. They are drawn from the knowledge and experience of experts and consist of a combination of verbal statements, criteria, and key examples to describe different levels of performance. They are used by judges and adjudicators to measure a particular performance against a predetermined standard.

The next issue of *In Common* will explore a range of alternative assessment methods that teachers and schools can use to measure student achievement.

AQ in the North

A Report of a Primary Basic Additional Qualifications Course at Lakehead University

This course was conducted in the spring of 1993 under the leadership of course director Mike Deineka, who helped to prepare this report.

Thirty candidates were enrolled in the course. They were introduced to "inquiry and active learning" during the first nine hours of the course. This was done through a unit of work based on the picture book *John Brown, Rose, and the Midnight Cat* by Jenny Wagner (Scarsdale, N.Y.: Bradbury Press, 1978). The candidates took part in large-group, small-group, and individual activities. Standards were negotiated with the candidates for each activity, and the standards were then used for peer and self-evaluations.

Each candidate had to find two or three children of Primary age in the community and "buddy up" with them for the six-week course. These children became their source of data for making curricular decisions and identifying the characteristics of the Primary child.

The culmination project for the course required the candidates to simulate an actual teaching situation in the Primary Division of a school. Five Primary Divisions were organized. Each division had six teachers, two for each of Grades 1, 2, and 3. In each division, the teachers had to agree on a theme that would be used in all three grades. For example, one division chose animals as its theme. Then the teachers of each grade in the division selected subthemes and designed activities appropriate for their children's particular age/grade level, matching them to outcomes from *The Common Curriculum, Grades 1-9*. Thus, the division that chose the theme of animals selected the subthemes of farm animals for Grade 1, pets for Grade 2, and woodland animals for Grade 3. Areas of study, questions, problems, and standards for each of the activities were negotiated with the children.

After the themes had been thoroughly explored through a variety of learning activities, the teachers of each grade in each division planned an event to give the children an opportunity to share their research findings and demonstrate their learning to each other. From these demonstrations each grade chose what it wished to share with the other two grades in a kind of "Festival of Learning". The teachers then took the children to a location that had direct relevance to the theme, but had not previously been visited or studied. For example, the grade that had been studying pets visited a veterinarian's office. Here the children had an opportunity to apply or adapt the attitudes, values, and knowledge gained through the study of the subtheme in a new but relevant context.

Throughout the process, the candidates met regularly within and across the three grades to reflect on the children's learning and to assess and modify the learning activities that had been used.

In the last phase of the course, some of the candidates took on the role of parents. The teachers presented the theme, classroom strategies, activities, outcomes, and standards to the parents in a simulated "Curriculum Night". The candidates who took on the role of parents were encouraged to ask questions based on *The Common Curriculum Highlights* tabloid published by the ministry for parents. Significantly, in this role they seemed to focus more on the learning strategies used to achieve the standards than on the meaning or number of the outcomes.

In this learning context, the candidates did not find *The Common Curriculum* to be overwhelming or difficult to implement. It does, however, require collaborative investigation over a period of time.

A Word From the Durham Board

There was a lot happening with regard to *The Common Curriculum, Grades 1-9* in the Durham Board of Education this summer. Several institutes were held on Co-operative Learning. Participants came from as far away as Vermont and the Thunder Bay area. The practical training sessions were based on a "train-the-trainer" model. Practical sessions were held on a variety of topics ranging from the application of co-operative learning principles

in a school to the advantages of co-operative leadership in a school. Institutes were also held on multiple models of learning. Programs lasted several days to provide in-depth professional development and an opportunity for teachers to network.

To date, approximately 3,000 Durham teachers have had some co-operative learning training. As a follow-up this fall, a small team of program people and Durham

teachers will attempt to match the Durham learning statements and goals with those of *The Common Curriculum*. The board will encourage schools to develop curriculum units that can be shared by all the schools in the board. Last year, Exeter Secondary School developed a unit for Grade 9 that integrates technology across the curriculum.

Let us know what is happening in your board.

Comments on The Common Curriculum, Grades 1-9

Here are some of the comments on the document received to date.

- The "global perspective" in education must be given high priority in order to stress the economic and ecological interdependence of communities and nations throughout the world, and the philosophy and attitudes needed to ensure the survival of humankind on this planet.
- Gender equity must be given more stress.
- Antiracism and ethnocultural equity must be further strengthened.
- Examples such as those provided in the Mathematics, Science, and Technology outcomes are very helpful.
- Professional development opportunities for teachers will be essential for proper implementation of outcomes-based education.
- The involvement of resource centres and community libraries must be emphasized; they have an important role to play in integrated programming.
- There are too many specific outcomes in Part IV.

• The document is difficult to evaluate at present; it needs to be viewed in the context of the new policies for the Specialization Years.

• We need to find ways to reduce the difficulties for students who must change schools.

Please participate ...

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June 1994. We hope you will respond to the following key questions for each of the four parts of the document:

- What is valuable? (Please give the reasons for your views.)
- What needs to be clarified? (Please provide suggestions for how the things you have identified could be clarified.)
- What needs to be changed? (Please provide suggestions for changes.)
- What needs to be added?

Please submit your or your group's views and suggestions to:

The Common Curriculum
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Toronto, Ontario M7A 1L2

The review and analysis of all the feedback received will be conducted by a committee that will include representatives from the educational community and the Ministry of Education and Training. The committee will be headed by Dr. Lorna Earle, a prominent Ontario research specialist. Summaries of the comments and suggestions received from all sectors of Ontario society and the policy options developed from them will be reported in the regular issues of *In Common*.

Early in 1994 a more systematic and comprehensive information-gathering process will be undertaken. This may include a survey of provincial stakeholders, a survey of school boards, and focus meetings with stakeholder groups.

A revised and updated version of *The Common Curriculum* is planned for December 1994.